

# Art Therapy

Liz McKnight

Registered Art Therapist

Art therapy is a mental health profession, a branch of psychotherapy with its own licensing credentials, that uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages. It is based on the belief that the creative process involved in artistic self-expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behaviour, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, and achieve insight.



Art therapy provides a visual as well as verbal approach to accessing and addressing needs. As a natural mode of communication, art therapy is a means of externalizing the complexities of emotions. Children rarely resist the art-making process because it offers ways to express themselves that are less threatening than strictly verbal means. Additionally, art helps children, teens and adults, to get away from the overstimulation of television, movies and video games, and to create their own peaceful and creative space.

My approach is humanistic, non-directive, client centered approach (Rogerian therapy), a humanistic philosophy based on the assumption that we each have the ability within, to be self directive and to solve problems.

In this approach:

Art therapy starts where the client is and can go as far as he or she is able.

The client will select and process things that are most important to them when ready to do so.

To have lasting value a change in behaviour must come from within, an insight the client has achieved.

The client has permission to be themselves.

The client is given the opportunity to take responsibility for making choices and to institute change: within the therapy room they are confronted with the challenge to function on their own.

They may recognize and clarify emotional attitudes.

They are offered a chance to learn to know themselves and chart their course more openly.

Creating art is an opportunity to channel inner growth into a constructive and positive way of life.



The client will be feeling their way, testing themselves and taking responsibility for self.

The client can show what they want to do.

They can order their world.

They can gain equilibrium.

They can achieve self-confidence.

They can gain self-respect.

They can express personality.

They experience independent thought and action.

They may release feelings and attitudes.

They become aware of the part they can play in directing their own life.



Making art can also:

Enhance sensory integration/processing.

Be an opportunity to engage in new materials.

Promote meaningful interactions with other people.

Increase motor coordination.

Decrease stress levels.

Increase creativity.

The therapist helps the client to separate out emotions and to evaluate them intellectually.

The relationship is of primary importance for the success of therapy.

The client is accepted completely by the therapist; this is necessary for maximum growth.

The therapist does not have expectations or make judgements.

The client must have confidence in the therapist to share feelings, to feel secure enough to share "bad" feelings when he or she is ready.

The therapist needs to be able to reflect back, listening to understand the client.

The therapist needs to be genuine and honest with the client, with empathy, with an "unconditional positive regard" for the client.

Rogers believed that the therapist be "supportive, not reconstructive." He used the analogy of bike riding. We can teach others and help them learn how to ride a bike, encourage them to try, but we will need to let go at some point because if we hang on they will never learn to balance the bicycle.

I agree with Winnicott, one of the founders of art therapy, who said ... "no human is free from the strain of relating our inner and outer reality." My belief is that the purpose of creativity, with any medium, is to relate our inner and outer selves in ways that lead toward psychological health. Art helps us to adjust our inner world to our environment. As the therapist, I will always appreciate the opportunity to assist and witness the development of a healthy spirit, the best that it can be, in this moment.

Liz McKnight

Registered Art Therapist

250 713 8857

articuleyes@mac.com

